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Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1886 (2009), 1941 (2010), 2005 (2011) and 2065 (2012), as well as resolution 2097 (2013), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), for a final period, until 31 March 2014. The report covers major developments in Sierra Leone and contains information on the implementation of the mission's mandate during the period from 1 September 2013 to 31 March 2014. Since it will be my final report on UNIPSIL, it also takes stock of the overall implementation of the UNIPSIL mandate since the establishment of the mission in 2008 and provides an assessment of the remaining challenges facing Sierra Leone after drawdown.

II. Mission mandate implementation, 2008-2014

2. UNIPSIL was established by Security Council resolution 1829 (2008) to provide political support to national and local efforts for identifying and resolving tensions and threats of potential conflict; monitor and promote human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law, including efforts to counter transnational organized crime and drug trafficking; consolidate good governance reforms, with a focus on anti-corruption instruments; support decentralization, reviewing the 1991 Constitution and the enactment of relevant legislation; and closely coordinate with and support the work of the Peacebuilding Commission. In its resolution 1829 (2008), the Council underscored the importance of establishing a fully integrated office with effective coordination of strategy and programmes among the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Sierra Leone and emphasized the need for the United Nations system to support and cooperate fully with UNIPSIL, in accordance with the Executive Representative's function as Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator. The Council stressed the need for close cooperation between UNIPSIL, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Mano River Union, international partners and other United Nations missions in the region. Moreover, it emphasized the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding.

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3. As a fully integrated mission, UNIPSIL coordinated closely with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes through a strategic framework known as the Joint Vision for Sierra Leone of the United Nations Family. The Joint Vision outlined the common priorities, as well as the operational and logistical arrangements, for the United Nations system in Sierra Leone. It integrated the UNIPSIL political mandate, together with the development and humanitarian mandates of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, in a mutually reinforcing manner to foster peace and stability and advance social and economic development.

4. In the aftermath of the 2007 elections, UNIPSIL led efforts aimed at managing election-related conflict and promoting dialogue and the resolution of disputes among political parties and key national stakeholders. Following politically motivated violent incidents in Freetown in February 2009 between supporters of the two main political parties — the All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) — the mission facilitated the signing of a joint communiqué between the two parties on 2 April 2009. In the communiqué, the parties denounced violence and committed themselves to engaging in a political dialogue to resolve their differences. That agreement laid the ground for the establishment of cross-party youth and women associations — the All Political Parties Youth Association and the All Political Parties Women's Association — whose efforts to promote peaceful elections and foster inter-party dialogue have been consistently supported by UNIPSIL.

5. Throughout its mandate, UNIPSIL has maintained close contacts with the country's political parties and continuously emphasized the need for dialogue and political tolerance. Furthermore, it has actively promoted the role of the Political Parties Registration Commission in facilitating dialogue among the political parties. The Political Parties Registration Commission and the National Commission for Democracy, which also plays an important role in consolidating peace and promoting democratic governance, have both benefited from assistance through the Peacebuilding Fund. At the local level, UNIPSIL has provided technical advice to district code-of-conduct monitoring committees and district security committees in managing political disputes and addressing security issues.

6. In 2012, UNIPSIL assisted the Government of Sierra Leone in preparing and carrying out peaceful and credible elections. Prior to that, UNIPSIL had played a key role in defusing tensions between the National Electoral Commission and SLPP and facilitated the resolution of a long-standing disagreement over the results of the 2007 elections, paving the way for collaborative work between the parties during the 2012 electoral process. Those efforts, coupled with the support provided by other partners, including through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) basket fund, contributed to peaceful and credible elections in 2012, marking another important milestone in the country's democratic transition.

7. In close coordination with the Government, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the National Electoral Commission, the country's 10 registered political parties and other significant actors, UNIPSIL implemented a comprehensive programme aimed at promoting non-violence and political participation, especially by women and youth, and at building the capacity of democratic governance institutions. The programme focused on non-State actors,

including women's and youth associations, traditional and religious leaders, the media, academia, artists and other key stakeholders.

8. In January 2010, the Government of Sierra Leone established the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation with the support of UNIPSIL and UNDP. The company, which replaced the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, was among the first independent broadcasting corporations in Africa. UNIPSIL also facilitated the creation, in October 2010, of the Guild of Editors, an association of the country's major newspaper editors.

9. Throughout its mandate, UNIPSIL has coordinated closely with the Sierra Leone police force and the Office of National Security in support of the reform, institutional development and capacity-building of the police, including with respect to combating illicit drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as corruption within the police force. The mission has deployed United Nations police advisers to the provincial headquarters of the police in Bo, Kenema and Koidu. Concrete achievements have been made in enhancing police skills in investigations, public order management, criminal procedural code, airport policing and border control, as well as in the area of local-needs policing.

10. In coordination with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNIPSIL has supported the Government of Sierra Leone in implementing the West Africa Coast Initiative to combat transnational organized crime. In February 2010, with the assistance of UNIPSIL, a transnational organized crime unit was established in Sierra Leone. The unit, the first of its kind in West Africa, was mandated to combat organized crime through national and international coordination and to enable intelligence-based investigations of international crime. In January 2014, my Executive Representative for UNIPSIL and the Executive Director of UNODC sent a joint letter to potential donors to ensure continued support for the transnational organized crime unit following the withdrawal of UNIPSIL.

11. With the assistance of UNIPSIL and UNDP, the police force of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Internal Affairs established the Independent Police Complaints Board in 2013. The bill to establish the Board was passed into law on 20 May 2013. Under a joint security sector reform project, UNIPSIL and UNDP, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, worked to facilitate the early operationalization of the Board, including by providing a technical adviser. The joint project was carried out in the framework of the global focal point arrangement on the rule of law that I established in September 2012.

12. Throughout its mandate, UNIPSIL has worked to strengthen the capacity of national human rights protection mechanisms. It has worked closely with the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone in building the capacity of the Commission to monitor, protect and promote human rights. The Commission has become a trusted and independent institution that is playing an important role in monitoring and promoting human rights in Sierra Leone. In May 2011, the Commission was awarded A status by the International Coordination Committee of National Human Rights Institutions for its compliance with the Paris Principles, which set out the minimum standards to be met by national human rights institutions.

13. In the area of public sector reform, UNIPSIL has worked with UNDP to develop an advisory note on rationalizing the system of external funding to the civil

and public service in Sierra Leone. The note, which outlined a framework for integrating externally funded civil and public servants into the Government's payment structure, laid the foundation for ongoing civil service reforms.

14. UNIPSIL and UNDP contributed to a series of capacity-building efforts directed at parliamentarians, including induction training sessions for new members of parliament that focused on key parliamentary roles, such as oversight, law-making and representation. The support resulted in the enactment in September 2007 of the Parliamentary Service Act, which established the Parliamentary Service Commission as an autonomous body separate from the civil service.

15. UNIPSIL has assisted the Government in implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and those emanating from the universal periodic review carried out under the auspices of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations. Moreover, it has assisted the Government in fulfilling its treaty reporting obligations through the development of a strategy that was completed in June 2010. Furthermore, UNIPSIL has provided technical and financial support to key State and non-State actors working on human rights and actively advocated for the enactment of crucial laws relating to the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities.

16. In line with its work to implement Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), UNIPSIL has supported the efforts of the Government, the United Nations country team and civil society in promoting gender equality, women's empowerment and political participation, as well as in combating violence against women. To that end, the mission and the country team have facilitated the development of a national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), as well as the establishment of the All Political Parties Women's Association and of family support units within the national police force.

17. UNIPSIL has coordinated closely with ECOWAS and the Mano River Union on efforts to tackle transnational crime, ensure cross-border security and promote stability during the elections in 2012. The mission provided support to the Mano River Union in establishing more than 15 cross-border security units along the common borders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

III. Recent developments and activities of the mission

A. Political developments

18. On 29 October 2013, Parliament enacted the Freedom of Information Bill; two days later, the President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, signed it into law. The bill, which had been tabled in Parliament in 2010, seeks to ensure free access to information.

19. On 19 November 2013, the Parliament of Sierra Leone amended section 79 of the 1991 Constitution to include a provision making it possible only for elected members of parliament to be eligible to serve as Speaker of Parliament. The new act, entitled "Constitution of Sierra Leone Amendment Act, 2013", nullified the former criteria, according to which a Speaker had to be a judge of the High Court. SLPP and civil society organizations objected to the amendment, expressing concern

that it could undermine the work of the Constitutional Review Committee, whose responsibility it is to review the 1991 Constitution.

20. On 27 November 2013, following a High Court ruling, the National Electoral Commission announced the results of two parliamentary elections held on 17 November 2012 in constituencies 15 and 5, in Kenema and Kailahun districts, respectively. The Commission declared the APC candidates in the two constituencies the winners. SLPP subsequently challenged the ruling in the Court of Appeals.

21. On 19 December 2013, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) informed the Government of Sierra Leone that it had postponed its decision on the country's qualification for MCC grants owing to inadequate progress in the fight against corruption. Subsequently, however, MCC announced that the development of its compact would continue, given the expectation that Sierra Leone would meet the requirements and be eligible in 2014.

22. On 20 December 2013, the President of Sierra Leone spoke at the official opening of a session of the Parliament. He gave an overview of his government's achievements and elaborated on the challenges ahead, in particular with respect to corruption and the health, education and energy sectors.

23. During the reporting period, the President continued his outreach efforts to promote political dialogue. On 8 January 2014, he met with leaders of the 10 registered political parties in the country and reiterated his pledge that he would not seek re-election at the end of his second five-year term. All parties recognized the need for multiparty talks in order to reduce political tensions and build consensus on critical issues of national interest. It was agreed that regular consultations among political parties would be held both in Freetown and in the regions.

24. The President held several meetings in January 2014 with representatives of civil society organizations and the media to encourage dialogue and enhance collaboration with his government in managing the affairs of the country. The meeting with the media focused on the recent arrests of journalists and searches of their offices by the police, thus providing an opportunity for constructive engagement between the media and State institutions.

25. On 9 and 19 January 2014, the Political Parties Registration Commission organized dialogue sessions on the review of the 1991 Constitution in Freetown and Bo for the leaders of the 10 registered political parties. The sessions, which took place with the support of UNIPSIL, provided an opportunity for political parties to learn more about the constitutional review process and how they could engage in it.

26. I visited Sierra Leone from 4 to 6 March 2014 to observe first-hand the progress made in the country since the establishment of UNIPSIL and to attend a ceremony marking the closure of UNIPSIL and the transfer of mission activities to the United Nations country team. I met with the President and members of his Cabinet, as well as with representatives of political parties and civil society.

B. Security

27. The overall security situation in the country remained calm and stable during the reporting period. On 12 and 13 December 2013, a joint border assessment mission was conducted by the transnational organized crime units in Sierra Leone and Liberia along the south-eastern border of Sierra Leone with Guinea and Liberia. The mission's objective was to assess the border crossings between Liberia and Sierra Leone. In addition, representatives of the two transnational organized crime units held a meeting in a border town in Liberia, during which they discussed border security issues and agreed on plans for enhancing collaboration, especially in the conduct of joint operations and training sessions in the future.

28. During the reporting period, UNODC continued to conduct training sessions for the security forces of Sierra Leone. On 18 and 19 October 2013, UNODC supported the judiciary of Sierra Leone in organizing a workshop on complex drug trials and related cases for 17 magistrates, prosecutors and transnational organized crime unit representatives. In November 2013, UNODC and UNIPSIL conducted a five-day training course for 25 transnational organized crime unit investigators. The course covered drug trafficking, police intervention techniques, criminal investigations, information management and information analysis.

IV. Socioeconomic developments and activities of the United Nations country team

29. In spite of global economic uncertainties, the economy of Sierra Leone has remained resilient and relatively stable. The economy grew by 15.2 per cent in 2012, mainly owing to the revival of the iron ore industry, and achieved the projected growth rate for 2013 of 13.3 per cent. As the Government focuses on improving the business climate and scaling up investments in infrastructure and agriculture, the country's economy is expected to continue growing. According to preliminary estimates by the International Monetary Fund, the real gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to increase by 14 per cent in 2014 and by 12.4 per cent in 2015 owing to the expected increase in iron ore production and non-iron ore activity.

30. Domestic revenue collection has also improved, from 11.5 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 12.2 per cent of GDP in 2012; it is expected to reach 12.5 per cent of non-iron ore GDP in 2013. The National Revenue Authority collected 1.87 trillion leones in 2012 (approximately $431 million), financing 73 per cent of government expenditure that year. For 2013, the Authority mobilized an estimated 2.3 trillion leones (approximately $530 million) in domestic revenue, above the target of 2.2 trillion leones (approximately $507 million), which helped finance 82 per cent of government spending.

31. On 21 October 2013, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund approved a new economic and financial programme for Sierra Leone covering the period 2013-2016. The programme is supported by the Fund's Extended Credit Facility, which provides access to funds in the amount of $95.9 million, equivalent to 60 per cent of the Sierra Leonean quota at the Fund.

32. The financial and economic programme supported by the Extended Credit Facility enables the implementation of the Government's Agenda for Prosperity (2013-2018), which focuses on: (a) consolidating the gains from the previous programme supported by the Facility, including macroeconomic stability underpinned by prudent fiscal and monetary policies; (b) strengthening revenue performance and improving public financial management to efficiently channel adequate resources to infrastructure and poverty-related spending; and (c) stepping up financial sector reforms to support financial and economic growth.

33. On 4 February 2014, the Development Partners Committee, which is chaired by the President of Sierra Leone and co-chaired by my Executive Representative and the Country Manager of the World Bank, held a meeting in Freetown. The partners signed a mutual accountability framework, thereby confirming the commitment of both the Government and development partners to working closely together to strengthen Government-donor relations within the framework of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. The partners also discussed engagement with the Government during the post-UNIPSIL period, expressing their appreciation for the role of the mission and urging Committee members to continue their engagement during the transition.

V. Human rights and the rule of law

A. Human Rights Commission

34. On 10 December 2013, the Human Rights Commission commemorated Human Rights Day in Freetown by holding an event that was attended by the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice, other representatives of State institutions, UNIPSIL and others from the international community. The Commission noted that it had resolved 70 per cent of the 1,800 human rights cases submitted for its consideration during its seven years of existence. UNIPSIL used the occasion to highlight the need for an independent media commission and a national association of journalists to strengthen further media-related freedom in the country.

B. Persons with disabilities

35. On 3 December 2013, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was commemorated in Freetown at a ceremony attended by the President, the Vice-President and members of cabinet. The President stated that the Government had established the Disability Commission and enacted the Disability Act of 2011 to provide people with disabilities unfettered access to education, health care and employment.

VI. Implementation of the mission transition plan on core programmes

A. Constitutional review process programme

36. UNIPSIL and UNDP continued to provide support to the ongoing national constitutional review process. Since its launch in July 2013, the Constitutional Review Committee has carried out a series of activities, including civic education and public consultations such as a workshop on thematic issues with the support of UNIPSIL and UNDP. To complement the efforts of the Committee, UNIPSIL, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, has organized a series of dialogues to facilitate discussion of the process with political parties, women's and youth groups and religious and traditional leaders.

B. Security sector reform programme

37. The United Nations security sector support programme, which will be implemented after UNIPSIL withdraws, was launched in January 2014 with support from the Peacebuilding Fund and UNDP. The programme was developed in close collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone. UNDP has engaged a security sector reform adviser to lead implementation. The programme management board, which includes UNIPSIL, held its first meeting on 17 January 2014 to kick-start the programme.

C. Conflict prevention programme

38. During the reporting period, UNIPSIL continued to make efforts to support the creation of a national infrastructure for peace and to address conflict. However, a number of critical political and technical challenges still need to be addressed in order to equip national institutions with the full capacities needed to resolve crises peacefully. The United Nations country team will continue that work, including by developing a conflict prevention project aimed at supporting national and local efforts to identify and resolve tensions and threats to peace.

D. Human rights and the rule of law programme

39. On 31 December 2013, UNIPSIL completed its human rights responsibilities and handed over residual tasks to the United Nations country team and relevant national partners, in accordance with its transition plan. In January 2014, a human rights adviser was deployed to the Resident Coordinator's office in Freetown to provide support in the area of human rights.

E. Completion of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework

40. As part of the UNIPSIL transition plan and to mark the completion of the transitional joint vision and return to a system based on the Resident Coordinator, a

United Nations Development Assistance Framework has been developed. With the endorsement of the Government, an advance draft of the Framework was submitted to the Regional Directors' Team in December 2013. The final version of the Framework was completed in March 2014 and implementation is expected to start on 1 January 2015.

F. Mission liquidation

41. In accordance with its transition and exit strategy, UNIPSIL has continued to carry out its liquidation plan and to hand over residual tasks to the United Nations country team. All four regional offices were closed by December 2013. Two of the regional offices were taken over by UNDP and the United Nations Children's Fund, thereby enabling a continued United Nations presence in the field. To ensure the continuity of medical services for staff of the United Nations country team and their dependants after UNIPSIL has closed, the Joint Medical Service has been transferred from UNIPSIL to the country team and will continue to operate under the overall administration of UNDP.

42. In close coordination with the United Nations Global Service Centre presence in Brindisi, Italy, and United Nations Headquarters, UNIPSIL has continued to dispose of its equipment. Priority has been given to redeploying assets in good condition to new and expanding United Nations operations, such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic, as well as other United Nations missions. UNIPSIL assets have also been transferred to the Department of Safety and Security and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sierra Leone in order to strengthen security arrangements and ensure the continuation of human rights activities. Unserviceable assets have been disposed of through commercial sales, while the remaining property will be either sold at nominal value to the United Nations country team or given away as support to the Government, United Nations partners and other local institutions. UNMIL has supported UNIPSIL with the disposal of hazardous waste and assets for destruction as no local facilities existed in Sierra Leone for the disposal of such assets.

43. During the drawdown period, the mission was actively engaged in an outreach campaign to find employment for national staff of UNIPSIL by holding meetings with the United Nations country team, local companies, the diplomatic community and relevant non-governmental organizations. It also brought employment opportunities in the local market to the attention of national staff members. The mission managed to secure employment for over 50 per cent of its national staff. The United Nations Mission in Liberia, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Regional Service Centre at Entebbe, Uganda, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Global Service Centre continued to support UNIPSIL by providing temporary staff to fill the void left by those who had been reassigned. A 23-member liquidation team will remain in the country for a period of two months — from 1 April to 31 May 2014 — to complete the liquidation of the mission in accordance with United Nations rules and procedures.

VII. Assessment and future challenges

44. Over the past 12 years, since the formal end of the civil conflict, Sierra Leone has made remarkable strides in post-conflict recovery, peace consolidation and democratic transition with the support of successive United Nations peace operations. While the current economic and political trajectory is positive, efforts must continue to be made to consolidate those gains.

45. It is encouraging to note that, since the end of the conflict, Sierra Leoneans have elected their government representatives at both the national and local levels. Elections now take place at regular intervals, resulting in peaceful changes in leadership in central and local governments. While elections have sometimes faced challenges, including disputes, it is important to note that the conduct of elections has been firmly established as the norm in the country.

46. Today, Sierra Leoneans live at peace with one another and generally feel free and that it is safe to travel to any part of the country without fear. The recognition of and respect for freedom of association and opinion has resulted in the establishment of a number of active political parties, civil society organizations, media outlets and professional associations. Sierra Leone has made significant progress in terms of religious freedom. The State authorities cooperate with traditional leaders; political parties interact with independent media outlets; and Muslim, Christian and minority religious communities coexist in harmony and work together to drive forward the country's evolving democratic culture.

47. Notwithstanding the aforementioned achievements, challenges linked to the root causes of the conflict continue to require attention. Among the challenges are the high poverty rate, corruption, youth unemployment, mutual distrust between APC and SLPP (the two main political parties that have alternated in power since independence), election-related tensions and perceived ethnic and regional imbalances and political exclusion. The enormous economic opportunities created as a result of the discovery and exploitation of vast mineral resources must be managed if the country's development aspirations are to be realized and if all Sierra Leoneans are to experience tangible improvements in their standard of living.

48. In addressing the aforementioned challenges, it is important for all segments of Sierra Leonean society, including the Government, political parties and civil society, to work together in an atmosphere that promotes the national interest over individual and political party agendas.

49. With the support of UNIPSIL and its international partners, Sierra Leone has made tremendous progress in building capacity for the promotion and protection of human rights. A positive human rights environment has enabled the enactment of crucial laws in support of the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities, thereby improving the legal framework to protect vulnerable segments of the population. However, in further consolidating those achievements, more needs to be done to promote the rule of law and instil confidence in the country's justice and security institutions.

50. With regard to regional developments, addressing transnational organized crime, protecting maritime resources and countering piracy remain priority areas of collaboration for West African countries in general and the Mano River Union in particular.

VIII. Observations

51. The closure of UNIPSIL marks the successful conclusion of over 15 years of successive United Nations peace operations in Sierra Leone. The overall success of those operations is attributable first and foremost to the determination of the overwhelming majority of Sierra Leoneans to build and entrench peace in their country. It is also the result of a remarkable level of multilateral cooperation involving the host country and its people, the United Nations and regional and international partners. Through these unique partnerships, new and innovative approaches to peacekeeping, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding have been effected. Important lessons have been drawn from the experience of Sierra Leone and replicated in other United Nations operations. Sierra Leone has been a pioneer not only in addressing transitional justice through the innovative mechanisms of a hybrid court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but also as a country where the United Nations has operated and delivered as one in a fully integrated manner. Sierra Leone has demonstrated that multilateralism can indeed succeed and yield positive results when all actors work together in true partnership to promote durable peace, democratic transformation and development in a post-conflict country.

52. I commend the Government and people of Sierra Leone for the significant progress made since the end of the civil conflict in consolidating peace and promoting the democratic and economic transformation of the country. At the same time, much remains to be done to make those achievements irreversible: the remaining root causes of the conflict need to be addressed and a firm culture of rule of law, human rights, accountability and political tolerance needs to be established, among other things. The praiseworthy record established by Sierra Leone in guaranteeing freedom of association and opinion should be maintained and further strengthened through the cooperation of both the media and State institutions. Overall, the challenge for Sierra Leone is to sustain its peacebuilding agenda in order to improve political, social and development gains in a mutually reinforcing manner. In this context, the most important tasks ahead are the successful conclusion of the ongoing constitutional review process and implementation of the Agenda for Prosperity. To that end, I commend the commitments made by the Government of Sierra Leone and, in particular, the leadership of President Koroma.

53. I am encouraged by the socioeconomic progress made by Sierra Leone and the prospects for the country's continued growth. As investment increases and the economy grows, it is essential to ensure that development is people-focused and that opportunities are created for shared prosperity and economic security for all citizens. To achieve that goal, the creation of an attractive business environment, by addressing mismanagement and combating corruption, should continue to be given priority attention.

54. It is essential to build on the gains made in the political arena and to ensure more inclusive and accountable governance structures. This will require the commitment and readiness of all Sierra Leonean political actors, in particular the leadership of APC and SLPP, the two main political parties. As the United Nations political presence ends, I am concerned about the continued intra-party disputes and lack of cohesion affecting the country's political parties. I urge the political parties of Sierra Leone to resolve their internal challenges through dialogue so as to preserve and nurture the multiparty political system so essential for peace,

democracy and development. Strengthening and empowering democratic institutions and governance remains one of the most important challenges. The constitutional review process represents an important opportunity in that regard.

55. The residual responsibilities of UNIPSIL are being transferred to the United Nations country team at a time when national institutions are assuming greater responsibility and ownership for the country's peacebuilding and development agenda. Nevertheless, the continued assistance of international partners is critical to complement national efforts to overcome the remaining challenges to improve infrastructure, enhance access to health care, reduce acute youth unemployment and provide social services. In that regard, I urge the development partners of Sierra Leone to fill the funding gaps for the implementation of the Agenda for Prosperity. Additional support to the United Nations country team through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework will also be essential.

56. As I emphasized during my visit to Sierra Leone from 4 to 6 March, I thank the Government and the people of Sierra Leone for hosting UNIPSIL and its preceding United Nations operations for over 15 years and for all the support and cooperation provided to the United Nations in the country. I am also grateful to the development partners of Sierra Leone for their support to peacebuilding and for their collaboration with UNIPSIL in the implementation of its mandate. Finally, I thank my Executive Representative, Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen, the staff of UNIPSIL, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, and other international and regional partners for their work and dedication to ensure the successful conclusion of the mission's mandate.